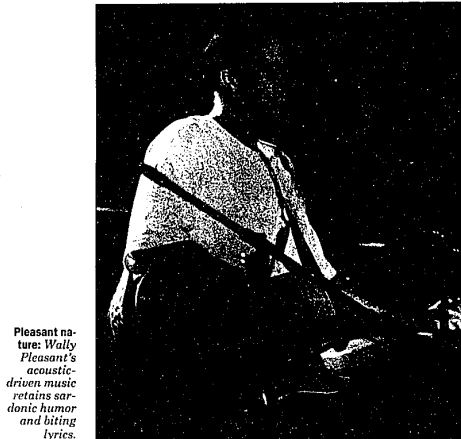


Politics of Passion



Pleasant nature; Wally Pleasant's acoustic-driven music retains sardonic humor and biting lyrics.

Folk artists bare souls more personally



Larry O'Connor

On the cover: Alex Lumselsky, who performs under the moniker of *Mooshka*, uses acoustic music to explore the personal politics of love and friendship. Bill Hansen took the trackside photo.

Woody Guthrie in the '40s and '50s and Bob Dylan and Phil Ochs in the '60s excelled in using the folk idiom to raise consciousness of an entire generation.

Through plaintive imagery, heartfelt lyrics tinged with bitter irony, their music made profound statements that hold weight even in these dire times.

Their efforts are certainly not lost on a new generation of folk artists who have emerged on the local circuit. They embrace a good deal of the passion and commitment of these forerunners of folk.

But such area performers as Wally Pleasant, Alex Lumselsky and Mary McGuire steer clear of the overt political commentary in their music.

"It's not because I don't care," says Mary McGuire, 30, who makes up one half of the musical tandem Mary McGuire & Myk Rise. "I write about things that happen to me and what happens to us, or people."

"Politics are a lot different than they were back in the '60s. There was a lot more change back then."

"Sure, I watch the news and pay attention to all the good and bad things going on," added Lumselsky, 24, who is a Southfield resident and performs under the moniker of *Mooshka*. "Right now, I'm not ready to comment on that ... I don't know why."

Instead Lumselsky's music, much like Wally Pleasant and Mary McGuire & Myk Rise, is a challenging foray into the personal politics of love and friendship. The journey is inward instead of outward.

In the case of Lumselsky and McGuire, acoustic music has become something of a refuge after stints in relatively successful local rock 'n' roll bands.

Lumselsky was a songwriter in the highly promising youthful group Phineas Gage, which broke up a year ago. McGuire was a member of the multi-talented outfit Ash Can VanGogh and later Spiral Dance.

Socio-political situations didn't draw them to acoustic music. Rather, the genre offers a more viable avenue to express feelings eloquently.

"It's a little more intimate than playing in a rock band," McGuire said. "And it's not as loud."

Pleasant agrees, though his music bridges a precarious gap between folk music, thoughtful introspection and 1980 punk irreverence. The 1985 Birmingham Groves graduate carved his niche as a sardonic storyteller.

His highly-coveted-after cassette "Sing About Stuff" has been fanned over by college radio — particularly at Michigan State University where Pleasant was a student. The release is fortified with 14 trash and biting nuggets, such



Folk following: Mary McGuire, who performed with the folk rock outfit Ash Can VanGogh opts for the more intimate setting of coffeehouses and small venues for her music as part of a performing duo with Myk Rise.

as "Psycho Roommate" and "She's in Love with a Greek." Audiences obviously prefer irreverence to political substance, judging by the overwhelming response to Pleasant's sounder of derivative tunes.

"People my age aren't really politically active," said Pleasant, 25, who's worked as a social worker, "but they're politically aware."

"If you do a song on something they feel strongly about, they'll get behind you. People don't like songs that vaguely talk about issues."

And if one of his numbers does take a political spin, it's usually wrapped in barbed cynicism. Pleasant has a song pegged for his soon-to-be released album entitled "I Was a

Teenage Republican," which humorously compares this young person's affiliation to that of a teenage werewolf.

The song perhaps mirrors the distrust the 20-something generation has for the political process as a whole.

"I have kind of grown up in an era where I hear my dad talking about the days when you could get a good factory job and own a house right out of high school," Pleasant said. "Today, you can't do that with a college degree."

"It's hard not to be cynical."

Questions? Comment? Write to Larry O'Connor, Street Scene, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 30251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150, or call 623-2130.

Friday, Oct. 2

NEW PETERBURGERS
Blind Pig, 200 S. First, Ann Arbor.
996-8553

STITCHES OF DISTINCTION
WITH SPECIAL GUESTS BLEACH AND KINSMAN
History, 15 S. Saginaw, Pontiac.
334-1999

ENIGMAS
St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit.
(What a deal — There's two of them, Kim Osh and Kelsey Osh, in this all-female con-

glomerated band out of the fertile Detroit
alternative scene that also features former
Throwing Music Temps (Downtown).
961-MELT

JELLY ROLL BLUES BAND
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor.
996-2747

WYK
Michigan Theatre, 603 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor.
99-MUSIC

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 14
BIG DAVE & THE ULTRA JONKS
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor.
996-2747

FRIDAY, OCT. 16
CHRIS WHITLEY AND JOHN CAMPBELL
Michigan Theatre, 603 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor.
99-MUSIC

LOUIE BROOKS
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor.
996-2747

NINE TUNING AND THE POWER TUNO
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor.
996-2747

LYLE LOVETT
Fox Theatre, Woodward Avenue, Detroit.
367-7009

OL. JOHN AND THE DIRT DUST GRASSBAND
Michigan Theatre, 603 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor.
99-MUSIC

FRANK ALLEMAN
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor.
996-2747

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